

Date: March 21, 2012

To: Redistricting Working Group
And
Minneapolis Charter Commission

Re: Minneapolis Ward redistricting

Full Testimony of Sheldon Mains

Hello, my name is Sheldon Mains. I reside at 2718 East 24th Street in Minneapolis. I am not representing any organization tonight—just myself.

You have a hard job. Thank you for taking it on. You are dealing with at least three minority populations who share portions of the same area of South Minneapolis. It is clear that none of the groups will be able to get everything they want. This is not about how many people show up at how many meetings for which group. This is about being fair to all residents of Minneapolis and getting the best ward map possible.

A few years ago I took a lot of heat for some votes I took to merge the Minneapolis and Hennepin County Libraries. I'm still taking heat for that. But that board did what we truly believe was the best for all residents of Minneapolis.

Your job is to say no. With all the competing interests, no one group can get everything they want.

I've been to four of your hearing now and have reviewed a lot of material on your website. I have a number of comments—I apologize that they may appear somewhat disjointed.

Basically, I'm going to tell you something that you already know. There are major problems with your current proposal for Ward 6 and how it impacts other wards—especially Wards 2 and 9. My comments apply equally to the two current proposed maps.

First, regarding the group from Cedar Riverside who you have heard the most from regarding a “East African Opportunity Ward”, while they are earnest and seem to have what they think is the best interest of the East

African community in mind, they clearly do not represent the desires of the East African community in the Seward Neighborhood. This is clear from the testimony last night. It appears that they didn't contact anyone in the Seward Community until residents of the Seward Neighborhood—who happen to be East African—testified last night in opposition to the proposals to split Seward into two wards. I'm glad that they are now talking to the people they claim to be representing. I wish that they would have come to the community (including the Seward Neighborhood Group) earlier. Who knows, we may have been able to find a win-win solution.

Second, I've heard a lot of talk about including a specific mosque in Ward 6. Remember, we do have the first amendment to the Constitution. Would you redistrict based on the location of a church synagogue or temple?

Third; the current proposals don't follow "communities of interest." You have heard last night that many of the East African residents of Seward do not want to be in a Somali Opportunity Ward--that they want to Seward to be all in one ward.

Seward also is not connected to the rest of the proposed Ward 6. There is only one pedestrian, bike or car connection between Seward and Ventura Village. That connection is Franklin Avenue and goes through what is referred to in both Ventura Village and Seward as "no-man's-land. It is about ¾ of a mile of industry, the LRT line and the portion of Hiawatha Avenue that is freeway—¾ of a mile with no residential buildings. Compare that to the five routes that connect Seward to rest of the 2nd Ward across I-94 to the north or even the two direct connections between Seward across the Mississippi to the SE portion of the 2nd Ward.

Finally remember that a lot of the residents (including in the apartments north of Franklin) of Seward are students, staff and faculty at Augsburg and the University.

Fourth, your principles include "Change current boundaries as little as possible." The current maps make significant changes. The February maps are much closer to the current boundaries.

Fifth; both current proposals separate Seward along economic lines. This week's proposal does that to a great extent than the "hearing maps." But both are bad. We have worked for years to eliminate that distinction in

Seward. You are increasing that distinction. In fact, I wonder if what you are proposing with Ward 6 would be considered “Packing” the poorest residents of Minneapolis into one ward (that is just a guess—I’m clearly not an attorney or expert in redistricting).

Sixth: In Seward we have a council member who shows up for just about every Seward Neighborhood Group board meeting and sends one of his aids or show up himself to just about every development committee and crime and safety committee meeting. When you split neighborhoods between wards, Council Members will not have the time or incentive to do this.

Seventh: In Seward we had a number of volunteers who helped the East African residents fill out the Census. They remember few East Africans checking “Black.” They primarily checked “Other” and filled in Somali nor Ethiopian or Oromo, etc. Assuming that this was fairly common, the numbers you are using are a significant under-count. This is important because the February proposal had about 40% Black population in the 6th Ward. This is probably a significant under estimate.

Eighth: The February map seemed much more logical. Was much more compact for both the 6th and 2nd Wards, and seemed to have many fewer problems. I suggest that you go back to that as a basis and make some more minor ‘tweaks’ to it.

Ninth: The “black population” of Ward 6 six in the February map was about 40 %. The newer maps have that population at around 45 to 46 percent. Is that 6 percent increase worth creating such gerrymandered wards. (The March proposed maps appear to be a worse case of gerrymandering than the redistricting in the 1980s when the 2nd ward boundaries were drawn based on who was supporting who in the DFL endorsing convention.)

Tenth: I think the Commission is forgetting recent Minneapolis history. The sixth ward has a Native American Council Member—with less than 10% Native American population. The Fifth Congressional District elected the first Muslim member of Congress. The president of the Minneapolis School Board is a Somali immigrant. The south-side recently elected a Native American member to the legislature from a district with a small Native population.

Finally: I urge you to go back the February maps. They were more

compact, provided for minority opportunity wards, and kept communities of interest together. Another benefit is that they have already gone through the public hearing process. You have heard from the public about where the problems are with those maps. Those maps probably need some tweaks. But do your work based on those maps.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheldon Mains". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and stylized.

Sheldon Mains